

Episode Twenty-Two - Book Two - Epicurean Philosophy As The Only Way To Defeat Fear of Death And Other Errors As To The Goal of Life

Post by "Cassius" of June 6, 2020 at 5:12 PM

Welcome to Episode Twenty-Two of Lucretius Today.

I am your host Cassius, and together with my panelists from the EpicureanFriends.com forum, we'll walk you through the six books of Lucretius' poem, and discuss how Epicurean philosophy can apply to you today. Be aware that none of us are professional philosophers, and everyone here is a self-taught Epicurean. We encourage you to study Epicurus for yourself, and we suggest the best place to start is the book, "Epicurus and His Philosophy" by Canadian professor Norman DeWitt.

Before we start, here are three ground rules.

First: Our aim is to bring you an accurate presentation of [classical Epicurean philosophy](#) as the ancient Epicureans understood it, which may or may not agree with what you here about Epicurus at other places today.

Second: We aren't talking about Lucretius with the goal of promoting any modern political perspective. Epicurus must be understood on his own, and not in terms of competitive schools which may seem similar to Epicurus, but are fundamentally different and incompatible, such as Stoicism, Humanism, Buddhism, Taoism, Atheism, and Marxism.

Third: The essential base of Epicurean philosophy is a fundamental view of the nature of the universe. When you read the words of Lucretius you will find that Epicurus did not teach the pursuit of virtue or of luxury or of simple living as ends in themselves, but rather the pursuit of pleasure. From this perspective it is **feeling** which is the guide to life, and not supernatural gods, idealism, or virtue ethics. And as important as anything else, Epicurus taught that there is no life after death, and that any happiness we will ever have must come in THIS life, which is why it is so important not to waste time in confusion.

Now for today in this Episode 22, we begin Book Two with a discussion of how a proper philosophy - that of Epicurus - is the only answer to the fear of death and other mistakes that plague human existence.

Now let's join the discussion with today's text, the opening of Book Two, read by Martin

Note: In previous episodes we have discussed:

- (1) **Venus / Pleasure As Guide of Life:** That Pleasure, using the allegory of Venus, is the driving force of all life; That the way to rid ourselves of pain is to replace pain with pleasure, using the allegory of Venus entertaining Mars, the god of war;
- (2) **The Achievement of Epicurus:** That Epicurus was the great philosophic leader who stood up to supernatural religion, opened the gates to a proper understanding of nature, and thereby showed us how we too can emulate the life of gods;
- (3-4) **So Great Is The Power of Religion To Inspire Evil Deeds!** That it is not Epicurean philosophy, but supernatural religion, which is truly unholy and prompts men to commit evil deeds;
- (5) **On Resisting The Threats of Priests And Poets:** That false priests and philosophers will try to scare you away from Epicurean philosophy with threats of punishment after death, which is why you must understand that those threats cannot be true; That the key to freeing yourself from false religion and false philosophy is found in the study of nature;
- (6-7) **Step One: Nothing Comes From Nothing.** The first major observation which underlies all the rest of Epicurean philosophy is that we observe that **nothing is ever generated from nothing.**
- (8) **Step Two: Nothing Goes To Nothing.** The second major observation is that **nothing is ever destroyed completely to nothing.**
- (9) **The Evidence That Atoms Exist, Even Though They Are Unseen.** The next observation is that we know elemental particles exist, even though we cannot see them just like we know that wind and other things exist by observing their effects.
- (10-11) **The Void And Its Nature.** We also know that the void exists, because things must have space in which to move, as we see they do move.
- (12) **Everything We Experience Is Composed Of A Combination of Matter And Void.** Everything around us that we experience is a natural combination of atoms and void.
- (13) **The Things We Experience Are Properties and Qualities Of Atoms And Void And Cease To Exist When Their Atoms Disperse.** All things we experience around us are either (1) the **properties** (essential conjuncts; essential and unchanging) or **qualities** (events; inessential and changing depending on context) of bodies. All these arise from the nature, movement, and combinations of the atoms, and cease to exist when the atoms which compose the bodies disperse. Therefore it is incorrect to think that ideas or stories such as that of the Trojan war have any permanent existence.
- (14-15) **Atoms Are Solid And Indestructible, And Therefore Eternal.** The argument that atoms are solid and indestructible and therefore eternal.
- (16) **The Atoms Are Never Destroyed,** they Provide Continuity To All Nature, and there is a strict limit on Divisibility of All Things.
- (17) **All things are not made of a single element, such as fire, as some philosophers assert** - such as Heraclitus, who asserted all things are made of fire.

- (18) **All things are not simply formed from the four classical elements (earth, air, fire, and water)** - here there reference is to Empedocles who was a great man, but greatly fallen.
- (19) All things are not made of tiny pieces of the same thing, or of tiny pieces of all things, as Anaxagoras suggested.
- (20) The universe is infinite in size and has no limits to its size.
- (21) The earth is not the center of the universe.

Daniel Brown 1743 Edition:

'Tis pleasant, when a tempest drives the waves in the wide sea, to view the sad distress of others from the land; not that the pleasure is so sweet that others suffer, but the joy is this, to look upon the ills from which yourself are free. It likewise gives delight to view the bloody conflicts of a war, in battle ranged all over the plains, without a share of danger to yourself: But nothing is more sweet than to attain the serene 'tho lofty heights of true philosophy, well fortified by learning of the wise, and thence look down on others, and behold mankind wandering and roving every way, to find a path to happiness; they strive for wit, contend for nobility, labor nights and days with anxious care for heaps of wealth, and to be ministers of state.

O wretched are the thoughts of men! How blind their souls! In what dark roads they grope their way, in what distress is this life spent, short as it is! Don't you see Nature requires no more than the body free from pain, she may enjoy the mind easy and cheerful, removed from care and fear?

And then we find a little will suffice the nature of our bodies, and take off every pain; nay will afford much pleasure, and Nature wishes for nothing more desirable than this. What, no golden images of boys, holding forth blazing torches in their hands, to light the midnight revels of the great, adorn they house? What thy rooms shine not with silver, nor are overlaid with gold, nor do thy arched gilded roofs rebound with the strong notes of music? Yet we find men sweetly indulge their bodies as they lie together on the soft and tender grass, hard by a river's side, under the boughs of some high tree, without a heap of wealth; chiefly when the spring smiles, and the season of the year sprinkles the verdant herbs with flowery pride. Nor will a burning fever sooner leave the body when you are tossed in clothes embroidered on beds of blushing purple, than when you lie in coarsest blankets.

Since riches then afford no comfort to our bodies, nor nobleness, nor the glory of ambition, 'tis plain you are to think they do the mind no good. If, when you behold your furious legions embattled over the plains, waging mock war, or when you view your navy stand eager to engage, or bear away over the wide sea, if struck with sights like these your fearful superstitions and the dread of death forsake your mind, and leave your breast serene, and free from care, 'twere something.

But if these things are vain and all grimace, and the truth is that nor the fears of men, nor following cares fly from the sound of alarms or cruel darts, but boldly force their way among the kings and mighty of the earth; nor do they homage pay to shining gold, nor the gay splendor of a purple robe. Do you doubt but all this stuff is want of sense, and all our life is groping in the dark?

For as boys tremble and fear every thing in the dark night, so we, in open day, fear things as vain, and little to be feared, as those that children quake at in the dark, and fancy making toward them. This terror of the mind, this darkness then, not the sun's beams, nor the bright rays of day can scatter, but the light of nature and the rules of reason.

Munro:

It is sweet, when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure and delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt.

It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of war arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger.

But nothing is more welcome than to hold the lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise, from which you may look down upon others and see them wandering all abroad and going astray in their search for the path of life, see the contest among them of intellect, the rivalry of birth, the striving night and day with surpassing effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world.

O miserable minds of men! O blinded breasts! In what darkness of life and in how great dangers is passed this term of life whatever its duration! Not choose to see that nature craves for herself no more than this, that pain hold aloof from the body, and she in mind enjoy a feeling of pleasure exempt from care and fear? Therefore we see that for the body's nature few things are needed at all, such and such only as take away pain.

Nay, though more gratefully at times they can minister to us many choice delights, nature for her part wants them not, when there are no golden images of youths through the house holding in their right hands flaming lamps for supply of light to the nightly banquet, when the house shines not with silver nor glitters with gold nor do the paneled and gilded roofs reecho to the harp, what time, though these things be wanting, they spread themselves in groups on the soft grass beside a stream of water under the boughs of a high tree and at no great cost pleasantly refresh their bodies, above all when the weather smiles and the seasons of the year besprinkle the green grass with flowers.

Nor do hot fevers sooner quit the body if you toss about on pictured tapestry and blushing purple than if you must lie under a poor man's blanket.

Wherefore since treasures avail nothing in respect of our body nor birth nor the glory of kingly power, advancing farther you must hold that they are of no service to the mind as well; unless may be when you see your legions swarm over the ground of the campus waging the mimicry of war, strengthened flank and rear by powerful reserves and great force of cavalry, and you marshal them equipped in arms and animated with one spirit, thereupon you find that religious scruples scared by these things fly panic-stricken from the mind; and that then fears of death leave the breast unembarrassed and free from care, when you see your fleet swarm forth and spread itself far and wide.

But if we see that these things are food for laughter and mere mockeries, and in good truth the fears of men and dogging cares dread not the clash of arms and cruel weapons, if unabashed they mix among kings and caesars and stand not in awe of the glitter from gold nor the brilliant sheen of the purple robe, how can you doubt that this is wholly the prerogative of reason, when the whole of life withal is a struggle in the dark?

For even as children are flurried and dread all things in the thick darkness, thus we in the daylight fear at times things not a whit more to be dreaded than those which children shudder at in the dark and fancy sure to be.

This terror therefore and darkness of mind must be dispelled not by the rays of the sun and glittering shafts of day, but by the aspect and law of nature.

Bailey:

SWEET it is, when on the great sea the winds are buffeting the waters, to gaze from the land on another's great struggles; not because it is pleasure or joy that any one should be distressed, but because it is sweet to perceive from what misfortune you yourself are free. Sweet is it too, to behold great contests of war in full array over the plains, when you have no part in the danger. But nothing is more gladdening than to dwell in the calm high places, firmly embattled on the heights by the teaching of the wise, whence you can look down on others, and see them wandering hither and thither, going astray as they seek the way of life, in strife matching their wits or rival claims of birth, struggling night and day by surpassing effort to rise up to the height of power and gain possession of the world.

Ah! miserable minds of men, blind hearts! in what darkness of life, in what great dangers ye spend this little span of years! to think that ye should not see that nature cries aloud for nothing else but that pain may be kept far sundered from the body, and that, withdrawn from care and fear, she may enjoy in mind the sense of pleasure! And so we see that for the body's nature but few things at all are needful, even such as can take away pain.

Yea, though pleasantly enough from time to time they can prepare for us in many ways a lap of luxury, yet nature herself feels no loss, if there are not golden images of youths about the halls, grasping fiery torches in their right hands, that light may be supplied to banquets at night, if the house does not glow with silver or gleam with gold, nor do fretted and gilded ceilings re-

echo to the lute. And yet, for all this, men lie in friendly groups on the soft grass near some stream of water under the branches of a tall tree, and at no great cost delightfully refresh their bodies, above all when the weather smiles on them, and the season of the year bestrews the green grass with flowers. Nor do fiery fevers more quickly quit the body, if you toss on broidered pictures and blushing purple, than if you must lie on the poor man's plaid.

Wherefore since in our body riches are of no profit, nor high birth nor the glories of kingship, for the rest, we must believe that they avail nothing for the mind as well; unless perchance, when you see your legions swarming over the spaces of the Campus, and provoking a mimic war, strengthened with hosts in reserve and forces of cavalry, when you draw them up equipped with arms, all alike eager for the fray, when you see the army wandering far and wide in busy haste, then alarmed by all this the scruples of religion fly in panic from your mind, or that the dread of death leaves your heart empty and free from care.

But if we see that these thoughts are mere mirth and mockery, and in very truth the fears of men and the cares that dog them fear not the clash of arms nor the weapons of war, but pass boldly among kings and lords of the world, nor dread the glitter that comes from gold nor the bright sheen of the purple robe, can you doubt that all such power belongs to reason alone, above all when the whole of life is but a struggle in darkness? For even as children tremble and fear everything in blinding darkness, so we sometimes dread in the light things that are no whit more to be feared than what children shudder at in the dark, and imagine will come to pass. This terror then, this darkness of the mind, must needs be scattered not by the rays of the sun and the gleaming shafts of day, but by the outer view and the inner law of nature.

Post by "Cassius" of June 7, 2020 at 8:32 AM

For those of us old enough to remember (or to remember our parents talking about it, the first words of this book are a phrase that bring back memory of this person:



<https://youtu.be/Z2hMYMaMbKc?t=175>

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/1594-episode-twenty-two-book-two-epicurean-philosophy-as-the-only-way-to-defeat-fear/>

Post by “Cassius” of June 12, 2020 at 3:14 PM

Episode 22 of the Lucretius Today Podcast is now available.

<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/30466430>

Post by “Don” of June 21, 2020 at 11:15 PM

An enjoyable episode.

The discussion of being in the grass beside a river with a group of friends reminded me of one of my favorite discoveries when doing my recent translation of the *Characteristics of the Epicurean Sage*: the one-word (in the original) characteristic of **φιλαγρήσειν** "They will love the ἀγρός "fields, land, country as opposed to the town.""